

A Journey of Harmony



If there is one theme that threads itself throughout the Megillah, it's *achdus*.

But here's the thing: when it comes to *achdus*, it's so much easier to talk the talk than to **walk the walk**. We're all so different. There are a thousand things that pull us apart from each other, from small irritants to big ideologies.

She talks differently: too loud, too direct, too repetitive, demanding too much attention.

She thinks differently: too liberal, too close-minded, too judgmental.

She acts differently: stepping into our boundaries, trying to outshine us, being critical, being over fragile, being aggressive or needy or acting in a thousand ways that make us withdraw from her and even reject her.



A *achdus* sounds so beautiful. When it happens, when we feel **part of something bigger than us**—say, at a *Tehillim* gathering or in a choir—we feel so uplifted and energized. But when we come back down to earth and return to everyday routine, the *achdus* that we touched and inhaled, that felt so beautiful, feels elusive.

What does this mean? Why should this be? And is there any solution?

Unity and Purim

Between the *mishloach manos* and the other mitzvos of the day, Purim is all about *achdus*. Each knock on the door brings another dose of friendship, and each costumed child brings a smile to our lips. No question about it: **It's a day of togetherness.**

The root of this harmony is found in the Megillah. “Go and gather all the people,” Esther told Mordechai before she dared to approach Achashveirosh.¹ Their unity was a direct cause of their salvation. Instead of being *mefuzar u'mefurad*, “scattered and dispersed,”² they found **themselves in each other and each other in themselves.**

It goes even further. The climax of Purim was the moment of *kiyemu v'kiblu*—when Klal Yisrael reaccepted the Torah from a place of love. Just as at *mattan Torah*, Klal Yisrael encamped around Har Sinai “as one man with one heart,”³ the Jews' new acceptance of the Torah was preceded by a newfound unity. A togetherness of heart and purpose **that led to a renewed union with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.**

1. *Esther* 4:16.

2. *Ibid.* 3:8.

3. *Rashi* on *Shemos* 19:2.

There's another parallel, one that's darker and filled with shadow.

Klal Yisrael were within days of their final destination at Har Sinai. They were almost ready. They encamped at Refidim—and Amalek attacked.

Thousands of years later, **the same pattern**: before the Jews reaccept the Torah, they must deal with the existential threat of Haman. A decree of genocide, no less, on men, women, children.

The correspondence is clear: if Klal Yisrael were traveling toward unity and an everlasting bond with Hashem, Amalek would prevent it.

Division and Disunity

This is Amalek: **while the Jews seek to unite, their aim is to divide**. It's an aim so central to who they are that they'll risk everything to achieve it. Launch into illogical wars. Renounce all the honor and prestige they possess. They'll empty out their coffers of ten thousand talents of silver. All to sow discord and division.

What was the nature of this schism and separation that Amalek wanted?

Amalek aimed for a **threefold rift**:

- They wanted to cut Klal Yisrael off from Hashem.
- They wanted to cut Klal Yisrael off from each other.
- And they wanted to cut Klal Yisrael off from themselves.

Let's explore the battle of Amalek.

4. See *Rashi, Esther* 9:10.

5. *Megillah* 11a.

Target: The Beis HaMikdash

Surprisingly enough, the ten sons of Haman **have their first appearance a few years before the Purim story**.

Here's what happened:

A little more than fifty years after the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash, the Bavl'im (who had destroyed the Beis HaMikdash) were vanquished by the rising Persian Empire. The Persian king, Koresh the Great, authorized the Jews to rebuild the Mikdash.

But things went wrong. The Samaritans interfered, convincing Koresh to retract his authorization to rebuild, and, devastatingly, the construction was stopped. When Koresh died, there was a glimmer of hope: perhaps now they could continue building the Mikdash? But the **ten sons of Haman quickly intervened**, sending incendiary letters to Achashveirosh, the new Persian king, that would destroy all possibility of rebuilding the house of Hashem.⁴

Of course, they found a willing partner in Achashveirosh.⁵ At his hedonistic 180-day banquet, he flaunted the vessels of the Beis HaMikdash and donned the clothing of the Kohen Gadol, giving a clear message to the Jews who resided in his kingdom: the Beis HaMikdash is no more.

Why the **antipathy, the crusade against the Beis HaMikdash**?

It may seem that frail, limited, imperfect humanity has no connection with Hashem—all-good, all-knowing, endlessly compassionate and just—but **the Beis HaMikdash shows us otherwise.**

The Beis HaMikdash was a place of connection, where the Shechinah from above rested on this physical earth. **It was the place where Hashem showed the world:** I don't just live in the Heavens. I'm not a G-d who created the world and then discarded it, who is far removed from your reality, who has no connection with your daily life.

Come to the Beis HaMikdash, and you'll see that there are five constant miracles. You'll see that there's forgiveness: you can bring a *korban* and the sins you committed, in the privacy of your daily life, are gone. Your everyday affairs are meaningful, and Hashem is there with you. And you can “see and be seen” by Me each Yom Tov at the *aliyah l'regel*, when all Jews make the journey to Yerushalayim to celebrate the festivals in the Holy City and offer sacrifices. When that happens, though thousands gather in a city that is small, no one says, “There is no place for me.”⁶ **Each person knows their value and worth;** each person understands how they fit into the community.

The Beis HaMikdash was a meeting place between Klal Yisrael and Hashem, and for all Jews to encounter each other—and their essential selves. It was the place where harmony replaced division. Where peace triumphed over discord. Where the Oneness of Hashem **found expression**

in the one chosen nation, in every single Jew who was placed in this world to reflect His light.

No wonder it was the ultimate target for Amalek.

The Science of Schism

Let's travel further back in time and join Klal Yisrael as they journeyed toward Har Sinai to receive the Torah. At the penultimate stop of their journey—Refidim—Amalek attacked.

Refidim, Chazal tells us, wasn't simply a place name. It indicated the Jews' spiritual state: “The Jews became lax [*rippu*] with regard to the statements of the Torah.”⁷

No wonder they were at risk of attack. **There was a chink in their spiritual armor.**

That's what we usually think.

But the *Shem MiShmuel* asks us to **pause and consider:**⁸

Klal Yisrael hadn't yet received the Torah. In fact, they hadn't even arrived at Har Sinai! So what was their “laxity” in Torah? What had they done wrong? And what really caused Amalek to attack?

Let's look at the context. This was the very last stop before Har Sinai. Just a few more miles, just a few more days, and they would be experiencing revelation.

Wait. They weren't ready. They weren't worthy.

They were still far from the people they should be.

6. *Avos* 5:5.

7. *Bechoros* 5b.

8. See *Shem MiShmuel, Parashas Zachor* 5670.

They knew that they were on a spiritual journey—refining themselves, shedding themselves of the slave mentality and the attitudes that they had absorbed in Mitzrayim, embracing Hashem’s Oneness and His control over all of creation and embracing their new status as *bnei bechori Yisrael*. **This was an intense journey.** So what went wrong?

The *Shem MiShmuel* tells us: “They made an accounting and they found themselves far from where they wanted to be, and so they grew weary and slackened off, **because of their despair.**”

What didn’t they realize? That the distance between us and Hashem means nothing, because at any moment Hashem can lift us toward Him. The nature of our bond is not a transaction: I get to this point, and then I’ll deserve it. It operates on a different plane. It is a bond between a Father and a child. Such a bond can contain ups and down, complexities, and even ambivalence. **It’s about striving, thinking, trying, turning, wanting, failing, falling, and trying again.** Refidim, becoming lax—when it happens, because we all have ups and downs—is all part of the journey to Sinai. It’s contained within the complexity and beautiful simplicity of our relationship with Hashem.

But instead of embracing the process, Klal Yisrael despaired. When we panic and feel like giving up, all those times when we overthink and become discouraged—when we doubt that we’re good enough, that we’re worthy of a relationship—all of this causes schism instead of unity. We feel

cut off from ourselves, from our ideals, from the people we want to be, from Hashem.

And all of this **is an attack by Amalek.**

That’s why we have the mitzvah of eradicating the worldview of Amalek that resides deep within the recesses of our hearts.

We all know what that feels like. At some point we’ve all experienced a sense of disconnect. There’s someone we want to be—someone who is calm and wise, centered and generous. But we feel stuck in a place of frustration or anger. We may feel threatened, afraid, or even just scattered—unable to connect with that inner wholeness. More often than not, this manifests in our relationships. Judgment or criticism toward others may play out in our minds and even slip through our lips. While at times we may direct that harshness to people outside of us, **we are the first and primary target.**

Even today we are vulnerable to Amalek’s attacks. How do we counteract this? We return to the wisdom of Refidim. That place where Klal Yisrael were weary and discouraged. When we fail to find the wholeness we seek, when we’re faced with others who are different, when we feel that sense of disconnection, we can panic—or we can accept. Accept that life’s journey is never a straight route. Accept that we are all human, striving and failing, regrouping and trying again. Accept that all of us deserve compassion and understanding, encouragement and acceptance—**and the first recipient is me, in my place, where I am.** Not despite my messiness, but because of it.

A Sleeping Nation and an Old King

Now that we understand the aim and essence of Amalek, let's take another look at what happened in the Purim story.

What was going on in the days of Mordechai and Esther? They saw, felt, experienced Hashem's distance. Hashem had promised to redeem them after seventy years. Time was up, and there was no redemption in sight. More, Achashveirosh displayed the *keilim* of the Beis HaMikdash in an act of travesty and cynicism that seemed to go unanswered. The Jews—present at the feast—were witness to this, and yet they continued sipping their wine. It was a time of absolute despair. They felt that they were absolutely undeserving—and they asked: Has Hashem abandoned us? **Or is He still with us, in our degradation? In our distance?**

Haman was waiting for this exact moment. He noted their deep spiritual slumber: “*Yesheinim min hamitzvos*,” he declared.⁹ And he thought that this was the right time to introduce an irreparable breach between Klal Yisrael and HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

But what he didn't know was that **sleep is only a prelude for wakefulness**. For renewal. For connection.

He didn't know the secret of Adam and Chavah.

9. *Megillah* 13b.

10. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 8:1.

11. This is reminiscent of the relationship between Mordechai and Esther as husband and wife. They were separated, and she was taken to the palace, and there she grew into her own and they came together again as equals: they wrote the Megillah together, and she had a voice just as he did in the ultimate salvation of the Jews.

12. *Esther Rabbah* 7:13.

The First Slumber

When Adam and Chavah were created, Chazal tell us, they were one being.¹⁰ They were connected at the back with two faces that looked in opposite directions. But this state of merging and enmeshment wasn't considered a good thing. After all, true unity isn't simply being attached without having had any choice or wish. True unity comes from wanting that connection.

The only solution was for **Adam and Chavah to be separated**. Then they could turn around and face each other, make eye contact, be in a place of togetherness, appreciation, and *ratzon* that is called *panim b'panim*, face-to-face.

But first, **they were put to sleep**.

They fell into a deep slumber, wherein the two could be separated, become two distinct individuals. And then they could wake up, renewed and refreshed and ready to be unified.¹¹

This was what happened at the beginning of time. And it's what happened a few thousand years later, at the time of Purim. And it wasn't only Klal Yisrael who slumbered in the Purim story. Haman thought that Hashem was “old and tired,”¹² and no longer able to save the Jews as He had in Mitzrayim.

What was actually happening? Klal Yisrael was being prepared for a new level in their relationship. They had received the Torah with

some level of compulsion at Har Sinai. Now they were preparing to “turn around” and meet Hashem at a place of *panim b’panim*. To reaccept the Torah willingly and gladly. But this could only happen from a place of separation. They first had to experience a form of disconnection so that they could make the choice to reconnect.

This required that Hashem also withdraw into a mode of concealment, so that when they reunited, **it came from a place of yearning and joy**. The “old King” and the “sleeping nation” were preparing for the ultimate reunion.

Haman didn’t realize that sleep is a prelude for renewal. That the times of deepest darkness are a preparation for the greatest light. That the very distance brings the closeness: **a level of connection that can never be severed or tarnished**.

The Hidden Aron

The Megillah ends with the downfall of Haman and his ten sons, the salvation of Klal Yisrael, and the promotion of Mordechai.

It also led to **the building of the second Beis HaMikdash**.

Which, by many accounts, was a disappointment.

No Aron. No daily miracles. No awe-inspiring, breathtaking experiences. While it was a glorious edifice, from the spiritual perspective it was a far cry from the first Beis HaMikdash with all its wonders.

Why was this the case?

The Maharal explains the fundamental difference between the first and second Batei Mikdash.¹³ The first Beis HaMikdash was meant to show Hashem’s Oneness. To show the glory of His Shechinah in this world. **It epitomized the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael**—and therefore, when they cut themselves off from Hashem through the three cardinal sins, it was destroyed.

The second Beis HaMikdash was of a completely different nature. This was a Beis HaMikdash of *ahavas Yisrael*, of love and *achdus*. **A Beis HaMikdash that epitomized the unity of Klal Yisrael**. It demonstrated that when we are united, each one of us expresses another aspect of Hashem’s greatness. In the first Beis HaMikdash, we looked at the miracles and saw Hashem’s wonders. In the second, we looked at the face of our fellow Yid, and there saw the light of Hashem.

The *Nachalas Dovid* brings these powerful words to explain:

Just as Hashem is the singular and absolute one G-d, so the holy Jewish nation is one. This is because **their souls are hewn from the Source of all unity**. We have inside us a portion of G-d on high, so we must join together and connect deeply with each other. This unity is more than the unity of one body comprising many limbs that are joined together. At their root, our souls are all unified without any discord or separation at all.¹⁴

The first Mikdash expressed the Oneness of

13. *Netzach Yisrael*, chap. 4.

14. *Beis Dovid of the Nachalas Dovid*, *Derash* 6.

Hashem. The fusion of Heaven and earth. The way in which Hashem's Presence suffuses even this world.

The second Mikdash expressed the unity of the nation. **As Hashem's ambassadors in this world**, we, too, express His Oneness and unity. By connecting and unifying as one, we bring Hashem's light of Oneness into our reality.

All of which brings us to the *Aron*.

By the time the second Beis HaMikdash was rebuilt, the *Aron* had already been hidden. In the Mishkan and first Beis HaMikdash, the *Aron* was the place where the Shechinah rested, the epicenter of the Sanctuary. Does that mean that the second Beis HaMikdash was like an empty shell?

On a deeper level, it means that **the *Aron* was present but deep under the ground**. We couldn't see it, but if we paused and looked beyond our corporeal vision, we could sense that hidden pulse of holiness.

And this is the work of unity.

We may not always see Hashem's light in the people around us. They can be annoying or demanding, or we may simply not feel any connection. But like the hidden *Aron*, we can pause, look beyond corporeal vision, **and sense the hidden pulse of the *tzelem Elokim* that's inside each one of us**. We can find the very heart of connection. By finding the hidden *Aron* inside each and every one of us, we're united as one.

This is true unity. It's far more than partnership. It's a lot more than compassion, friendliness, or a general attitude of helpfulness.

Achdus means seeing the light of Hashem in each and every Jew. Just as a white light contains every color, Hashem's Oneness is multifaceted and all-encompassing. People can look and be very different. A billion shades, a thousand different hues, an unending palette of color—**all contained within the glow of white**.

When we allow ourselves to dig deep, to see past the outer shell and uncover Hashem's light in others, that is our ultimate triumph over Amalek.

One Nation, One Heart

On Purim, the first thing we do is read the Megillah. The story of Purim takes a series of disparate incidents that take place over the span of nine years and connects them into one story. It makes a sequence, a cause and effect, a narrative out of what looks like a mishmash of meaninglessness. **It imposes order on chaos**.

We can do the same with our individual stories, seeing the unity in our life's journey. It's the awareness that we're treading a path with a destination—and the road itself is meaningful. It's been constructed for me, personally, to evoke my contribution to bringing Hashem's glory into the world. This idea invests each day with meaning and gives us the conviction that we don't simply bump through each day. The events in our lives are not just fragmented coincidences, **but our lives take us on a specific pathway with a purpose**.

Seeing the unity in our life story is the first step in our journey toward oneness. It is a unity that allows us to have a closer relationship

with Hashem and to each other. When we see purpose in our personal journey, **we can acknowledge that Hashem is in charge and that He orchestrated everything that happens to us.** We can also forge healthy relationships with others, secure in the knowledge that each of us is traversing the path we are meant to take, and this allows us to make room for each other, free of jealousy and resentment.

It is on Purim that all this is brought home to us in a very real way. Purim is the day when we dig deep. We find the *Aron* within ourselves and within each other. We return to center—to the wholeness and oneness of who we can be.

When we've affirmed our essential connection to Hashem and the innate goodness that comes from that, when we acknowledge the purpose in the path He has put us on, then the world looks different. We feel a sense of peace and serenity that comes from **accepting who I am even as I work toward the who I can be.**

When we enter into this space, **we can experience the ultimate triumph.** We've beaten weariness. We've vanquished despair. We've conquered all those things that fracture us as people, as a nation, as Hashem's children.

And we wake up and dance.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

Discussion Points

- From the battle in Refidim, we learned that Amalek attacked when they sensed that Klal Yisrael had weakened their hold on their conviction that they were worthy of being in a relationship with Hashem. Here we see that the fragmentation that Amalek wants to achieve starts from within. Can you think of a time when you felt this way but nevertheless succeeded in overcoming those feelings? What helped you? What thoughts and actions were effective?
- The second Beis HaMikdash expressed *achdus*. And the secret was in the hidden *Aron*. How can we find the hidden *Aron*—that point of goodness and sanctity—in the people around us? What about within ourselves?
- How has this piece changed your thoughts about *achdus*?
- Many of us connect to Purim as a day of *tefillah*, a day when our *tefillos* will be answered even if we're not deserving of them. How does this tie in with the idea of *achdus*? Have the ideas in this piece given you different channels to connect with this special (but sometimes confusing) day? Share these with your group.

Achdus in Action

Mind experiment: Next time you're annoyed by someone, imagine how you would handle it if it was your sister who annoyed you. We know the timbre of the relationship: we don't have to be close, but we would do anything for each other. Because there's something deeper between you than the messiness on her side of the room.

Ultimately, we want to see not just the toddler who's made a mess all over the floor, but the sight of his gleeful smile as he does so. What fills our field of vision? Do we view differences with curiosity and embrace them or do they fill us with fear?

How can we find Hashem's light in the people around us?

1. Accept differences in others and ourselves—after all, Hashem made us that way because He wanted us to be exactly this way in the world.
2. Try celebrating others' strengths and begin with praise. For example, imagine telling your rival at work, "Wow, I see how much you invest in doing things right!"
3. Refine your own self-worth—it's not because I'm "better than" but because "I'm enough."

Uprooting Jealousy

Jealousy, hatred, and competition all come from the same root: when a person doesn't fully believe that no one can touch what is prepared for him or her as an individual. Everything belongs to Hashem, and He bestows it as He sees fit. This is the lesson of the Megillah: **that Hashem is present in every way and is pulling the strings in every situation**. And so our reading of the Megillah is followed by *mishloach manos*: when we're nullified to Hashem's will, we can give to others, because everything we have is ours and that which we don't have is not ours. It goes even further: we give *mattanos l'evyonim*. We demonstrate our belief that even **if I give what is mine to others, I will lack for nothing**, because everything is from Hashem, who can replenish my pockets and provide exactly what I need.

(Kedushas Levi, Kedushos on Purim, Kedushah Sheini)

